

Four Creative Lesson Plans

by

Julie Lyonn Lieberman

www.julielyonn.com

Table of Contents:

Class 1: Four Approaches to Listening ... **pages 2 - 3**

Handout #1: Four Approaches to Listening

Class 2: Melodic Variations ... **pages 4 - 6**

Handout #2: Melodic Variations

Class 3: Creativity in Motion ... **pages 7 - 8**

Handout #3: Creativity in Motion

Class 4: Rhythmic Primer ... **pages 9 - 12**

Handout #4: Rhythmic Primer

These lesson plans were originally developed as four of seven lesson plans for the national project, ***The Green Anthem*** (www.greenanthem.org), which launched in 2010 under the auspices of Music Educators National Conference.

Class 1: Four Approaches to Listening

Lead your students through the following exercise:

Hold a pencil or pen six inches in front of your nose and stare at it until all of your visual attention is on that object ...continue to stare at it as you open up your peripheral vision to notice other objects that are close by ...now let yourself notice objects that are far away from you.

Continue to hold the pencil or pen in place and change your point of focus to something that is directly across the room from you as you continue to notice the pen or pencil. Stare straight ahead, but also try to see objects as far to the outer reaches of your peripheral vision as possible: above you, below you, all of the way to the left, and now all of the way to the right.

Put the pencil or pen down, pick a color, and scan the room for that color. Try to screen everything else out. Pick another color and scan for that color. Alternate scanning through your peripheral vision and your direct gaze. Now close your eyes and rest them for a moment ...

Let's look at your handout:

Using the **Four Approaches to Listening** handout, ask a student to read the explanation to the exercise they just completed out loud (or you can read it aloud). Lead a class discussion using student's answers to the three questions on the handout. (Download the following mp3 files for free at www.greenanthem.org > materials > free support materials > mp3 files

Invite students to apply this concept of redirecting their focus to their ears by practicing each style of listening as applied to *The Green Anthem* or a recording of any other piece of music you choose.



1) **Background listening:** invite students to choose a separate point of focus for their attention (an event from past or future; counting from 100 backwards, staring out the window; reading a book, etc.) as you play *The Green Anthem* version #1 (unison parts: melody without lyrics)

2) **Single focus listening:** invite students to focus their listening attention on one instrument only. Challenge them to screen out the other parts as you play *The Green Anthem* (you can use any of the **mp3 versions 2 through 9**)

3) **Experiential listening:** invite students to link an emotion, a color, a visual recollection (someplace they've been, an imaginary place, a family pet, or a piece of artwork) to their experience while listening to the music as you play *The Green Anthem* (you can use any of the **mp3 versions #2 through #9**)

4) **Duplicative listening:** invite students to listen as if they were singing or playing the melody, even if they don't know what the pitches are. Depending on your age group, they can walk, tap, or mime the rhythms or they can even mime playing the melody (or mouth the words) in time to the music as if they are playing their instrument as you play *The Green Anthem* (you can use any of the **mp3 versions #2 through #9**)

Student Handout #1: Four Approaches to Listening

During our warm-up exercise, you probably noticed that you have the ability to redirect your visual attention in many different ways. You can apply this same skill to auditory attention — that is, to how you use your ears.

Think of a situation you were in when you listened to every detail as if your life depended on it. Write it down:

Can you think of a time when you were thinking about something else, but listened just enough to be able to say or do the right thing at the right time? Describe it:

Think of a time when you acted as if you were listening but didn't hear anything because you were busy thinking about something else:

Now try listening to the *The Green Anthem* by Julie Lyonn Lieberman four different ways.

1) **Background listening**: Choose something you can focus on outside of music. It can be an event from your past or something that is about to happen in your future; or, you can try to count from 100, backwards, stare out the window, read a book -- anything that will occupy your attention. Let the music of *The Green Anthem* drift around you as you focus elsewhere, but prepare to snap back to attention just as the music ends.

2) **Single focus listening**: This time, choose one voice out of the four choral parts or one instrument (piano, bass, timpani, or shakers). Try to follow that one part from *The Green Anthem* as you ignore the other parts.

3) **Experiential listening**: As you listen again, link an emotion or sensation, a color, or a visual recollection (someplace you've been or an imaginary place) to your experience while listening to the music and be prepared to describe your choice during class discussion. Here are some examples:

- happy, sad, angry, hopeful, wistful, joyous, yearning, accepting, disgusted, fearful, surprised ...
- blue, purple, lavender, green, yellow, orange, red, pink, lilac, white, brown, beige ...
- a forest, a city, the mountains, the ocean, a sports arena, riding a bicycle ...

4) **Duplicative listening**: "To duplicate" something is to make an exact copy of it. In this case, try to listen to the music as if you are singing or playing the melody, even if you don't know what the pitches are. You can even mime or mouth the words in time to the music as if you are playing your instrument or singing. If you are a beginner, then try to tap or move to the rhythms.

Class 2: Melodic Variations

1) The *Melodic Variations Handout* illustrates melodic, rhythmic, and expressive variations as applied to the first two measures of the melody from *The Green Anthem*. Challenge students to identify and describe the variations.



You can use **mp3 #1*** to familiarize them with the core melodic line. (*See www.greenanthem.org and click on “materials” to download your free mp3 files.)

You can also use a piece of music from their current repertoire — particularly if it exemplifies a theme and its variation(s). Invite students to locate the main melodic theme and ask them to identify any variations the composer has created.

2) Invite your students to fill in their own variations in examples four, five and six on the handout (a melodic, a rhythmic, and an expressive variation). Invite each student to play or sing their variations and then point out the features of each. (If you have a large class, you can call on enough students to demonstrate a range of possibilities rather than calling on every single students in the class.)

- how did she/he fulfill the assignment?
- what effect did their variation have on the feel of the melodic line?

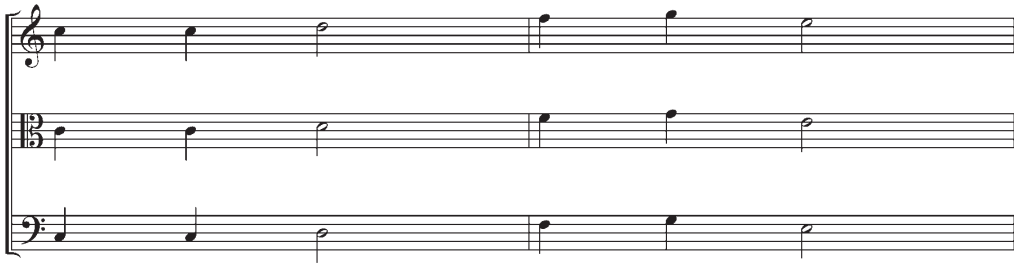
You may decide to repeat the assignment after analyzing a handful of student’s variations. You can also apply this assignment to a theme from their current repertoire to help them develop this skill.

3) Optional: provide students with song lyrics that you have written (or invite them to write their own) that has a few extra words in some of the lines, and challenge them to write a melody with melodic variations that will enable your lyrics to fit into a four-measure form.

Depending on your age group and level of skill, this lesson plan can also be accomplished as a class effort rather than by individuals. You may even opt to merge individual efforts into one final variation.

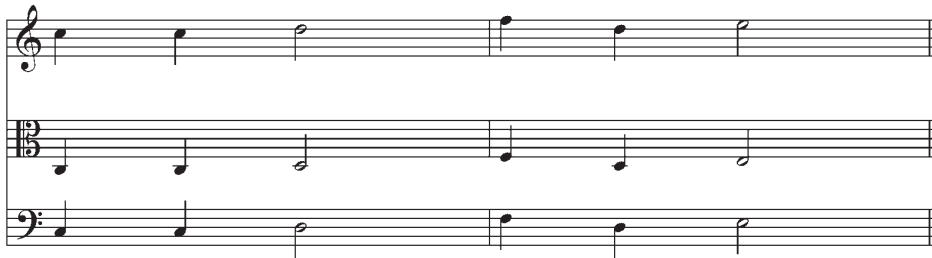
Handout #2: Melodic Variations — page 1 of 2 pages

Here are the first two measures of the melody from *The Green Anthem*.



A musical score for the first two measures of the melody from *The Green Anthem*. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top, a middle C clef staff in the middle, and a bass clef staff at the bottom. The melody is written in a simple, stepwise fashion across all three staves.

To make the melody more interesting as it repeats, or to fit new lyrics into the melody line, composers create variations on the melody. Here is a variation on the melody. Circle the notes that have changed and explain how they are different. Notice how you can still recognize the original melody line within the variation.



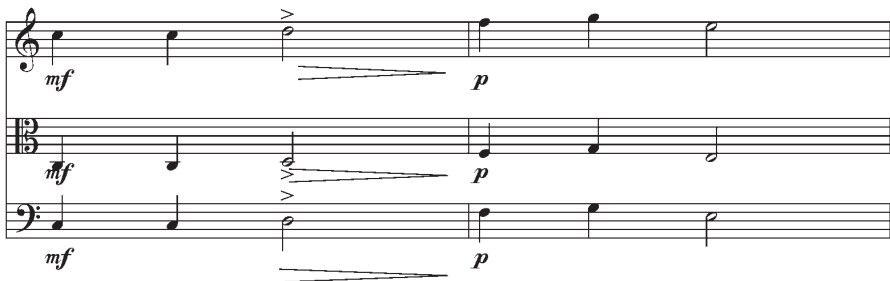
A musical score showing a variation on the melody. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top, a middle C clef staff in the middle, and a bass clef staff at the bottom. The melody is written in a simple, stepwise fashion across all three staves, with some notes changed from the original melody.

Here is a second variation on the melody. Circle the notes that have changed and explain how they are different:



A musical score showing a second variation on the melody. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top, a middle C clef staff in the middle, and a bass clef staff at the bottom. The melody is written in a simple, stepwise fashion across all three staves, with some notes changed from the original melody.

What's different in this third variation?



A musical score showing a third variation on the melody. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top, a middle C clef staff in the middle, and a bass clef staff at the bottom. The melody is written in a simple, stepwise fashion across all three staves, with some notes changed from the original melody. Dynamics markings *mf* and *p* are present, along with hairpins indicating volume changes.

Handout #2: Melodic Variations — page 2 of 2 pages

The Green Anthem is based on the C mixolydian scale, a major scale with a flatted seventh:

Musical notation showing the C mixolydian scale (C major scale with a flatted seventh) in treble, alto, and bass clefs. The scale is written as a sequence of notes: C, D, E, F, G, A, Bb.

Here are examples of some of the basic rhythms and dynamics that you can use as you write your variations:

Musical notation examples for rhythms and dynamics. The first staff shows: whole note, half note, quarter note, quarter note triplet, eighth notes, and triplets. The second staff shows dynamics: *f*, *mf*, *mp*, *p*, and crescendo/decrescendo markings.

Use the staff below to write your own melodic variation, rhythmic variation, and dynamics. Start by adding your clef and the time signature. Be prepared to sing or play your examples for the class.

Melodic Variation

Blank musical staff for writing a melodic variation.

Rhythmic Variation

Blank musical staff for writing a rhythmic variation.

Dynamic Variation

Blank musical staff for writing a dynamic variation.

Class 3: Creativity in Motion

Improvisation plays an important role in American music as well as in world music. In fact, at least 85% of the world's music includes some form of improvisation. Even Western European classical music's cadenza was originally intended as a place in the music where the artist could express their own ideas.

This lesson plan will help provide your students with the tools they will need to feel comfortable with creating their own musical ideas. This includes,

- 1) how to identify the tonal center and scale(s) most appropriate to each piece of music or accompaniment;
- 2) how to create a melodic phrase with those notes;
- 3) how to integrate rhythmic ideas into the melodic line;

In addition to the exercises outlined on the student handout, here are a few exercises designed to stimulate a higher comfort level:

Invite your students to bring in CDs with their favorite artists. Choose examples to play for the class and invite your students to first find a pitch that they can hold against the recording that sounds pleasing to them (if there are spots in the song that don't sound right, you can point out that the artist is using a different chord there and encourage them to find a note they can hold against that section). Then challenge them to create a five- to seven-note scale that sounds pleasing when played against the song. Try this a few times with different songs for practice. (Folk, pop, and early swing styles are the easiest to apply this exercise to.) Depending on your student's abilities, you may choose to supply audio yourself to ensure that the tracks support this assignment, i.e. a simpler harmonic form.

Choose a tonal center and scale out of the work you've just done, or use the C mixolydian scale from **The Green Anthem** (C D E F G A Bb C) and choose three or four notes out of that scale. Challenge your students to find every possible permutation (order) for those notes. Here are six permutations starting on a "C" note:

Starting on C

The image displays two musical staves, each containing six permutations of four notes (C, E, G, Bb) starting on C. The first staff shows six permutations in a 2x3 grid. The second staff shows six permutations in a 2x3 grid.

Notice how there are six possible ways you can organize four notes that start on the same pitch, without even applying rhythmic variations. There are 24 possible permutations for four notes in total by exploring the six permutations that start on (in this case) an "E", then a "G," and then a "Bb."

Invite your students to analyze how the example above has been organized. Using the ***Creativity in Motion*** handout, challenge your students to figure out every possible permutation starting on “E,” “G,” and/or “Bb.”

This exercise can also be applied as an ear training exercise. The students can sing each permutation while naming the notes: C, E, G, Bb, then C, E, Bb, G, etc. They can also sing the pitches while naming the fingerings. These games foster a whole-brain learning approach that all feed the improviser’s tool-box. (Imaging on the instrument is a right-brain activity; naming the notes is a left-brain activity; and audiating each pitch in order to sing activates yet other areas of the brain.)



Using the audio titled ***Improvisation Accompaniment*** (download for free at ***GreenAnthem.org > Materials > Audio > mp3 #10***), invite each student to make up a musical phrase using permutations of the four notes they have just practiced. If you limit each student to four notes as quarter notes, then you can move through the entire group quickly. This is an example of a safe, organized way to introduce some of the working principles of improvisation.

Then they can try working with the same four notes and add rhythmic ideas. If they need more structure to help them with this step, you can limit them to a specific rhythmic pattern. This pattern can be “borrowed” from one of the CDs they brought to class, a rhythmic phrase from your current repertoire, or a rhythmic phrase from ***The Green Anthem***.

Once your students feel comfortable with this exercise, you can practice the entire seven-note scale with them and challenge them to use all seven notes and any rhythmic ideas they want for soloing over the accompaniment. (If your students feel inhibited about improvising in front of the group, invite three or four students to improvise simultaneously while using the accompaniment.)

For over one-hundred improvisatory games and techniques, see “***The Creative Band and Orchestra***” by Julie Lyonn Lieberman.

Class 5 will introduce some rhythmic exercises. After completing that lesson plan, you can try coming back to the ***Green Anthem*** accompaniment and challenge your students to incorporate some of the rhythmic elements they have just learned into soloing.

Handout #3: Creativity in Motion

Everyone in the world improvises every day. When we speak, we are improvising. When we get up in the morning and decide what to wear, what to eat, the order in which we'll do things -- it's all a grand improvisation.

In music, there are a number of ways that musicians can improvise. Rock musicians create riffs; these are short, spicy melodic phrases that are repeated a number of times. Can you think of an example of a riff that your favorite artist uses and figure it out on your instrument?

In a sense, all composers are improvisers. They play with ideas, trying them out a number of different ways before they commit to the final version.

Choose a melody that you are familiar with ("Happy Birthday," "Twinkle Twinkle, a piece you're currently working on — anything you want) and play or sing one melodic phrase from the piece. Repeat the phrase but change the rhythms. Then stay true to the original rhythms, but change the order of the notes. You've just improvised!

When a musician improvises — whether the style is the blues, jazz, folk, rock, or a world style — they need to first identify the tonal center (key) of the piece of music and then the type of scale that the melody uses (major, minor, or any of the hundreds of modes used worldwide), You can quickly identify the scale through experimentation; trust your ears and search for notes that are used in the melody. Then, just like a composer, you can "play" with pitches and rhythmic ideas to create your own melodic ideas on the spot. Here is an example of six different combinations of four notes that all start on the tonic (the key or tonal center):

Starting on C

This block contains a musical score for six combinations of four notes starting on C. The score is written in treble, alto, and bass clefs. The first combination is C, D, E, F. The second is C, D, E, G. The third is C, D, F, G. The fourth is C, E, F, G. The fifth is C, D, G, A. The sixth is C, E, G, A. Each combination is shown in a single measure across the three staves.

This block contains a musical score for six combinations of four notes starting on C. The score is written in treble, alto, and bass clefs. The first combination is C, D, E, F. The second is C, D, E, G. The third is C, D, F, G. The fourth is C, E, F, G. The fifth is C, D, G, A. The sixth is C, E, G, A. Each combination is shown in a single measure across the three staves.

See if you can figure out six new combinations that start on the second of those four notes:

Starting on E

This block contains a musical score for six combinations of four notes starting on E. The score is written in treble, alto, and bass clefs. The first combination is E, F, G, A. The second is E, F, G, B. The third is E, F, A, B. The fourth is E, G, A, B. The fifth is E, F, B, C. The sixth is E, G, B, C. Each combination is shown in a single measure across the three staves.

This block contains a musical score for six combinations of four notes starting on E. The score is written in treble, alto, and bass clefs. The first combination is E, F, G, A. The second is E, F, G, B. The third is E, F, A, B. The fourth is E, G, A, B. The fifth is E, F, B, C. The sixth is E, G, B, C. Each combination is shown in a single measure across the three staves.

Class 4: Green Anthem Rhythmic Primer

Using the *Green Anthem Rhythmic Primer handout*, you will be introducing your students to the four primary rhythmic concepts or patterns employed by *The Green Anthem* choral, string orchestra, and concert band scores.

- 1) *cut time*
- 2) *eighth notes mixed with rests or tied*
- 3) *dotted quarter note followed by two sixteenth notes*
- 4) *quarter note triplets*

1) Cut Time

Optional Introduction to this section: “*Our voices create a natural beginning, middle, and end to each thought that we express through small changes in pitch and emphasis. Time signatures guide musicians by helping them create musical phrases; when we speak, we express our ideas in phrases.*”

Choose two students who can demonstrate musical phrasing through speech. Invite the first student to speak about what they did last weekend, and help the class analyze (and even imitate using gibberish) where they paused, the words or ideas they emphasized, how they highlighted those thoughts, as well as how they completed their description. Ask the class if they knew when the story was coming to an end before the speaker actually stopped. Then invite a second student to speak about the same topic, but ask them to speak with run-on sentences and challenge them to pause for breath in unusual places in the sentence (you can break this down and coach them as they go along by having them repeat a sentence a few different ways).

Invite your students to place their instruments safely to the side and ask them to stand. Ask them to march in 4/4 time, using the right foot to create an accent on the first of every four beats. Demonstrate by clapping on the first and third beats, and then invite them to join you. (This is a great opportunity to also practice clapping on the second and fourth beats and analyzing the difference in the feel.)

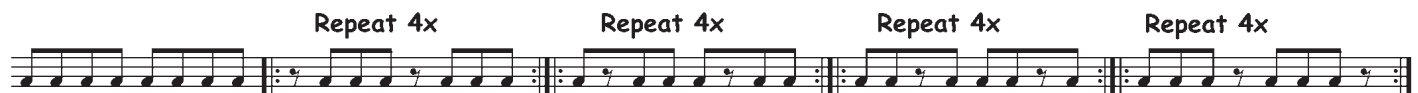
Sample Explanation of 4/4 time: *The Green Anthem* was written in 4/4 time. This means that there are four beats in every measure. Instead of emphasizing every beat, the music flows across the measure differently by emphasizing the first and third beats of each measure in cut time. You can demonstrate — or lead your students through this using “call and response” — by playing the following measures of the piece with a march-time emphasis on each of the four beats and then repeating that same passage with a phrased emphasis on the first and third beats of the measure.



2) eighth notes mixed with rests or tied

To create a fluid command over any combination of eighth notes and rests, it's important to establish the ability to hear (audiate) a steady stream of eighth notes irregardless of which notes are sounded out on one's instrument.

Invite students to tap or clap a steady pulse of 8th notes as they walk in 4/4 time using their feet (standing or seated). They can do this on their instruments through clicking, drumming, bouncing the stick of the bow, or any other creative safe method they would like to employ. Then invite them to rotate through each of the following options four times. Explain the exercise to them first verbally, and help them practice rotating the placement of the rests without reading the examples. This challenges them to draw upon a steady stream of 8th notes from their inner ear. Afterwards, they can refer to the Rhythmic Primer Handout for a visual confirmation.



Now invite your students to tie two eighth notes together: the first two, the second with the third, and then the third with the fourth. Refer to the handout and point out the standard notation that is commonly used for visual clarity rather than the 8th notes with slurs.



3) dotted quarter note followed by two sixteenth notes

You can also apply this exercise to sixteenth notes.



This practice technique will help you ease them into the dotted quarter note followed by two sixteenths that's used in *The Green Anthem*.



4) quarter-note triplets



Use call and response to teach this difficult-to-understand rhythm before students look at how the rhythm is notated. The audio track *Quarter-note triplet Accompaniment*, (available at GreenAnthem.org > *Materials* > *audio examples* > **mp3 #11**) offers a call and response game and alternates between quarter-note triplets unaccompanied, followed by quarter-note triplets against a 4/4 click track. Invite your students to first tap or clap in response to the track, and then repeat the exercise as they play on a single pitch.

You may need to repeat this exercise every class for a few days or even weeks before this rhythm sets in. Then you can use melodic excerpts from the score to build on this lesson plan.

Handout #4: Rhythmic Primer

To create a fluid command over any combination of eighth or sixteenth notes, it can be very useful to practice audiating (meaning hearing the rhythm in your inner ear) the rhythmic phrases from the piece of music first before you play them on your instrument. To practice this, choose a piece of music you are currently learning and then tap or clap the rhythms without paying attention to the pitches used in the melodic line.

If you find a rhythm that isn't clear to you, it can be useful to boil it down to basics. Here are a few exercises that will help you with that. We will be using some of the rhythms from *The Green Anthem* for practice. In some of the parts, there are measures that combine quarter notes, eighth notes, and rests. You can prepare yourself for every possible combination by practicing them all:

Repeat 4x Repeat 4x Repeat 4x Repeat 4x

Repeat 4x Repeat 4x Repeat 4x

A dotted quarter note followed by two sixteenth notes appears a number of times throughout the piece. Apply the exercises outlined above to sixteenth notes. Apply a rest to the first of every group of 16ths, then the second of every group, the third, and then the fourth. Then apply a slur to the first two, the middle two, and the last two.



A dotted quarter note equals three eighth notes. Two sixteenth notes equal one eighth note in that grouping. When you learn how to audiate (hear) the “rhythmic subtext” (in this case, the eighth notes that are hidden from sight but always there), you will feel quite comfortable with any new rhythmic phrase you come across.

You will now work with an audio track to practice quarter-note triplets. You will hear two groups of quarter-note triplets played across four beats. You will first clap the rhythm, and then play it on a single pitch. Your teacher will lead you through this exercise. A quarter-note triplet places three notes evenly across two beats. Understanding the quarter-note triplet does not help us hear it. That's why we will use an audio track to become familiar with this challenging rhythm. You can download it for free at www.greenanthem.org > materials > free support materials > mp3 files > mp3 #11 to practice at home.